

The Dominica Labour Party (DLP) maintained its parliamentary majority following general elections in December 2014, with Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit winning his third consecutive election at the helm of the party. The opposition United Workers' Party (UWP) contested the results, and the party's leader, Lennox Linton, indicated his intentions to challenge the results in court. Throughout the year, Linton and prominent DLP officials engaged in accusations of plagiarism, defamation, and violations of the Integrity in Public Office Act.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

### **Political Rights: 38 / 40 [Key]**

#### **A. Electoral Process:** 12 / 12

Dominica's unicameral House of Assembly consists of 30 members who serve five-year terms; 21 members are directly elected, 5 senators are appointed by the prime minister, and 4 are appointed by the opposition leader. The president, who is the ceremonial head of state, is elected by the House of Assembly for a five-year term, and the prime minister is appointed by the president.

In 2013, the government elected former minister of security Charles Savarin as president. The UWP contested Savarin's nomination and boycotted the election.

General elections were held in December 2014. The DLP won 15 seats, while the UWP captured six. The electoral observation mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) deemed the elections to be generally free and fair. However, UWP leader Linton challenged the outcome, citing violations of electoral law and announcing his intentions to pursue these claims in court.

The issuance of multipurpose identification cards to be used in voting commenced in October 2013 and continued in 2014, though the cards were not used in the December elections. In the run up to election, the Electoral Commission began to actively remove the names of deceased individuals from voter lists.

#### **B. Political Pluralism and Participation:** 16 / 16

The dominant political parties are the ruling social-democratic DLP and the opposition centrist UWP. The right-wing Dominica Freedom Party has not been represented in the parliament since 2005. Political parties are relatively free to organize and operate.

#### **C. Functioning of Government:** 10 / 12

The government generally implements anticorruption laws effectively. As an offshore financial center, Dominica passed a series of laws in 2011 to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

In February 2013, the Integrity in Public Office Commission (IPO) was scheduled hold a preliminary

hearing concerning a complaint against Prime Minister Skerrit. Linton, a radio journalist at the time, accused Skerrit of using his influence as chairman of the cabinet to secure concessions for luxury villas for which he allegedly holds ownership claims. A high court judge granted Skerrit's legal team leave to apply for judicial review of the IPO's decision to hold the hearing. The IPO has since postponed the hearing indefinitely, though the case remained open in 2014. The IPO has been the center of both scrutiny and criticism in recent years, as detractors suggest that nominees to the commission are too politically connected to constitute an impartial accountability mechanism. Dominica was ranked 39 out of 175 countries and territories in the 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

## **Civil Liberties: 57 / 60**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16**

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, and the press is generally free in practice. Four private weekly newspapers are published without interference, and there are both public and private radio stations. Citizens have unimpeded access to cable television and the internet. However, the country lacks access to information legislation, and defamation remains a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment or fines. Defamation lawsuits and threats are commonly used by the Skerrit government against members of the media, leading to an environment of self-censorship.

In March 2013, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) overruled a lower court decision against Linton for defamation. The original plaintiff's team subsequently sought appeal at the Privy Council in London, and the case remained pending in 2014. In June 2014, after Linton accused the government of harboring criminals on the radio, eight ministers launched a defamation suit against him, seeking \$1 million in damages. Linton filed a defense in July, and the case was ongoing at year's end.

Freedom of religion is protected under the constitution and other laws. While the majority of the population is Roman Catholic, Protestants and others practice freely. Academic freedom is respected.

### **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12**

The authorities uphold freedoms of assembly and association, and advocacy groups operate without interference. Workers have the right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, and laws prohibit anti-union discrimination by employers. However, agricultural workers in major industries face burdensome restrictions on their ability to strike. Less than 30 percent of the private sector is unionized.

### **F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16**

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law is enhanced by the courts' subordination to the inter-island ECSC. Although the judicial system generally operates efficiently, staffing shortfalls remain a problem. In 2013, the government announced plans to establish the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as its final court of appeal, replacing the Privy Council in London. After receiving agreement from the British government in January 2014, the parliament approved the measure in July.

The Dominica police force, which assumed responsibility for security after the military was disbanded in

1981, operates professionally, and there have been few complaints of violations of human rights in recent years. In August 2014, five police officers were charged in connection with the death of a detainee in a holding cell. The matter was stayed later in August to allow the high court to review of justiciability. In November, a high court judge ruled that the case could proceed, though no trial had been scheduled at year's end.

Members of Dominica's small indigenous population, the Carib-Kalingo, face a variety of challenges, including high poverty levels, encroachment on their territory by farmers, and difficulties in obtaining loans from banks. Rastafarians have reported discrimination and profiling by police.

Same-sex sexual relations are illegal, though the government has stated that the nation's Sexual Offences Act—which criminalizes “buggery”—has never been enforced. Nonetheless, the act contravenes Dominica's commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the country ratified in 1993.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16**

Women are underrepresented in government and hold just seven seats in the House of Assembly. No laws mandate equal pay for equal work in the private sector, or there are no protections against domestic abuse, which is a significant problem.

### **Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**[Full Methodology](#)**